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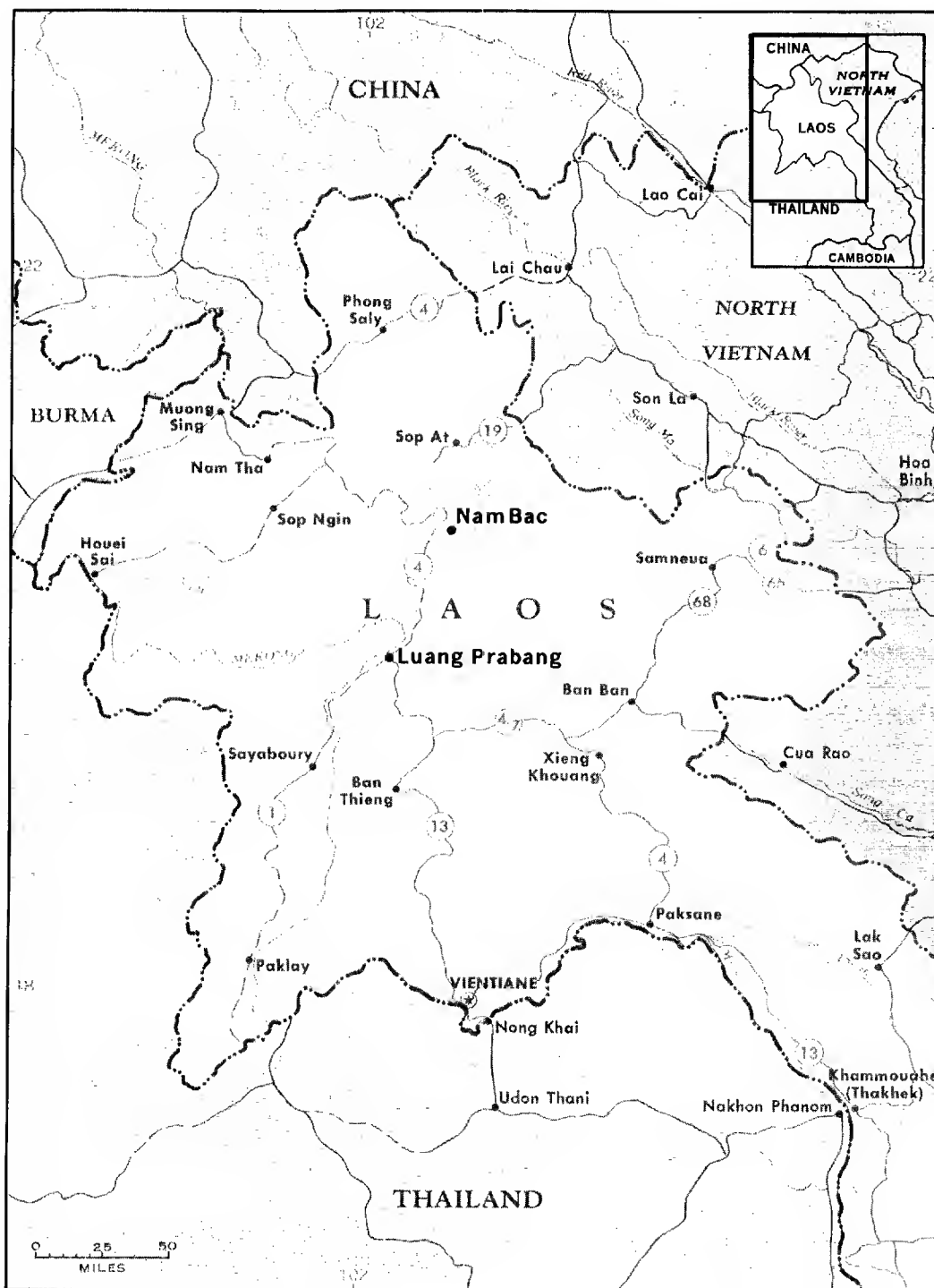
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Laos: The Communists have succeeded in over-running the important Laotian outpost at Nam Bac.

The collapse of the government's defense perimeter on 14 January culminated a ten-month campaign by the Communists to reoccupy an area they lost in August 1966, after controlling it for nearly ten years. Government forces are being redeployed approximately 20 miles to the south to block further Communist advances.

Lack of communication with Nam Bac has precluded an accurate assessment of the situation, but it appears that the Laotian Armed Forces General Staff, faced with growing Communist military pressure, decided that it was not worthwhile to hold the position. The King, fearing the loss of Nam Bac would threaten the approaches to the royal capital at Luang Prabang, had pressured the military into overextending itself in order to defend the area. This had resulted in a general weakening of the government's defense posture throughout Laos, most significantly in the south.

The loss of Nam Bac is more a reflection of the lack of decisive leadership within the Royal Laotian Army than an indication that the Communists have embarked on a larger offensive role in Laos.

Commander in chief General Ouan Rathikoun's reputation will probably be eroded, and there may be a new round of political maneuvering within the military for control of the armed forces.

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Cyprus: President Makarios' sudden call for national elections next month may represent a significant change in his public posture on a final settlement of the Cyprus dispute.

His widely publicized statement calling for new elections warned the Greek Cypriots that compromise will be necessary since "what is desirable" is not always "feasible." He appeared to be telling the Greek Cypriot community that enosis--union of the island with Greece--is no longer a realistic goal.

In an apparent gesture to the Turkish Cypriots, Makarios for the first time referred publicly to the "Turkish Community" rather than speaking of the Turkish minority on the island. He also noted that a "Charter of Rights" would be "entrenched" in the constitution.

Makarios further appeared to be calling for direct talks between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. He declared that his government is developing a "document" which could become the basis for discussions and urged the other side to do likewise.

Both Ankara and the Turkish Cypriot leaders have reacted cautiously to the announcement. Ankara has indicated it will not oppose elections if they are held according to the present constitution, but this could be a sticking point as Makarios no longer regards this constitution as valid. Turkish Cypriot leaders have thus far declined to comment, probably awaiting guidance from Ankara.

Although Makarios' new overture to the Turkish Cypriots may clear the way for direct talks between the two communities, past experience with Makarios weighs heavily on the side of caution. He may be trying to consolidate support within his own community by silencing criticism from the right-wing element that has been pushing for enosis. [REDACTED]

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Cuba: Fidel Castro has delivered one of his most bitter verbal attacks against US "imperialism."

Speaking at the closing session of the international Havana Cultural Congress on 12 January, Castro abandoned the relatively passive tone of his more recent speeches. He called the US a "universal enemy," the "buttress of all the reactionary governments" in the world and compared US foreign policy with that of Hitler. He expressed special annoyance with the US economic denial program, saying that the US is "sabotaging" Cuban efforts to make trade deals in Western Europe.

Castro, returning to his theme of last summer, made some stinging remarks about Communists who are lacking in revolutionary vigor. Undoubtedly referring to the pro-Moscow parties in Latin America, Castro said that Marxism needs to be revamped to "conduct itself like a revolutionary force, not like a pseudorevolutionary church." Castro castigated those parties not supporting "armed struggle" as being in the "rear guard" of the struggle against imperialism.

He described Ernesto "Che" Guevara as a paragon of revolutionary virtue, and offered to trade 100 political prisoners in Cuba "to be selected by the CIA and the Pentagon" for Guevara's corpse.

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Yugoslavia: The Yugoslav party has taken another step in its long-awaited purge by ousting 400 members of the Belgrade city organization.

The expulsions are the first large-scale reflection of Tito's call in a TV interview on 29 December for cleansing the party of members who oppose his liberal economic and social reforms. Most of those marked for expulsion are conservative older ex-partisans and minor bureaucrats who had backed former party secretary Aleksandar Rankovic before he was ousted in July 1966 for opposing the reforms and plotting against Tito.

Replacement of his supporters with new, younger members, combined with a current reorganization of local party machinery, will be an important step by the liberals in consolidating their control prior to the party congress scheduled for December.

The purge is likely to add to the regime's already ticklish nationality problem. Many Serbs, in particular, regard the decentralizing reform program as a blow to their prestige and economic interests.

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NOTE

West Germany - Yugoslavia: German and Yugoslav officials will meet in Paris this week to discuss procedures for restoring diplomatic ties between Bonn and Belgrade. Despite some anxiety about repercussions in Bonn, both countries are eager to normalize relations, which have been broken for more than ten years. Neither is expected to attach conditions to such a step. Controversial issues yet to be resolved, however, include the Yugoslav demand for indemnification of victims of the Nazis and Bonn's desire for Yugoslav support of the German right of self-determination.

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